

THE MONGOLIAN BUDDHIST CHURCH DURING THE PERIOD OF THE MANCHU RULE

The Qing emperors already realized during the early period of their rule the opportunities that were present in spreading the Tibetan originated Lamaism in Mongolia as well as establishing the Buddhist church there. During the consolidating period of their rule over the Mongols and later during their reign until 1911 they utilized the Buddhist church basically the same way as their earlier Mongol rivals did during the 16th–17th century. After the armed acquisition of power, the Buddhist church provided significant help in establishing, keeping and legitimizing the Qing rule in Mongolia.

After the death of the 5th Dalai Lama (1682) and the seizure of power over Tibet the Manchu emperors could directly influence the Dalai and Panchen Lama as well, who on occasion interfered in the Mongolian internal affairs on the emperor's direct orders. The squashing of the anti-Manchu rebellion of 1755-57 and the death of the 2nd head of the Buddhist church (1757) created another such opportunity to extend their rule that they could not leave unutilized.

After the destruction of the Oirats and their allies, other rebellious Mongol tribes that fought with them, the Manchu court was placed in such a powerful position that enabled it to directly control Mongolia's inner affairs including the Mongolian Buddhist church as well. Though Öndör Gegēn, the first *ḡebcundamba* was devoted to the Manchu dynasty, his second rebirth however was not so unambiguous about his commitment towards the Qing dynasty. His indecision during the rebellion led by Amarsana against the Manchu rule, his weak attempts at breaking away from the Qing dynasty and his pursuit of a Russian connection prompted the emperor's (Qianlong, reign 1736-1796) realization that if he wanted the Mongolian religious leader to fulfill the same role as his predecessor in 1691 he had to secure him under his direct control. Thus, in 1757 in a personal order to the Dalai and Panchen Lama he outright forbade them from searching for the next reincarnation of the head of the Mongolian church in Mongolia. His action was so successful that he singlehandedly secured that the *ḡebcundamba*, who is still so important for Mongolians today and who possessed by that time a significant amount of authority and political influence, has not been reborn in a Mongolian child until today. Later therefore, the spiritual leader of the Mongol's has always been Tibetan, who was forced to learn the Mongolian language on top of everything else if he wished to communicate with his subjects. Despite all of this, the importance of the church and the title did not diminish; what is more, by the end of the period – though not all of the later *ḡebcundambas*' character measured up fully to the expectations – it became a pillar of Mongolian society.

During the Manchu period the Buddhist church underwent a prominent growth, this, however, was only in part due to the support of the central power. The religion's extraordinarily malleable and adaptive nature that is so characteristic of Buddhism has been at least as much the cause of its expansion. This religion and ideology is almost

unprecedentedly capable and willing to adjust, to melt those religions' certain aspects that were present in certain regions before it and this is why it was so easily accepted by the Mongolian people as well. The representatives of the new religion that arrived from Tibet already established several monasteries in the early days. During the following years these monasteries became the centers of the given regions, provided protection for the travelers and those living nearby during the times of armed atrocities that were not at all uncommon in Mongolia back then. Often trade centers of sorts formed in their vicinity and it was through this intermediary role that they contributed to the spread of the religion.

After 1691, the Manchu dynasty, mainly to further its political goals, gave significant contributions to the church and the *Bogd Gegēn* himself. During the years of subjugation not only the taxes paid by the Mongols became regular occurrences but Manchu emperors also returned these "gifts" in an easily traceable and regular manner that naturally ended up enriching only the head lama's coffers and added to the church's incomes. From the end of the 17th century the Manchu emperors not only provided monetary funds and other forms of preferment, but also promoted the Yellow Hat sect's gain of power and the organization of its ranks in Mongolia with the establishment of several monasteries. One such monastery is the Buyan-i badarayulagči sūm, proffered by Kangxi to the devotees, which was established in the 17th century in Dolōn-nūr, the Amarbayasgalant (Mong. Amurbayasyulangtu) monastery built between 1730-37 which was donated to the *jebcundamba*, or the Dambadarjā (Mong. Dambadarjiya) monastery he had built in the 1760s and, naturally, the list goes on.

Besides the emperors, the Mongolian head lamas also established several temples and monasteries. Thus, during the 17th-19th centuries they had significantly grown in number and by the early 20th century there were almost 700 of them in the whole of Mongolia. There was no strong direct connection between the temples and the monasteries. They functioned more or less independently of each other as autonomous units. Often the lamas living in different monasteries only met each other during their pilgrimages. From an administrative point of view, the only connection that linked them together was the head of the Mongol Buddhist church, the *Bogd Gegēn*.

With the growth of the number of temples and monasteries their economic significance was likewise persistently strengthening. In 1639, the Mongol nobility presented the Öndör Gegēn, who was by then respected as a saint despite the fact that he did not hold any religious office yet, with 32 herding families. This was the first time in Mongol history that secular subjects under the rule of a religious dignity became the representatives of a new social group, the *šaw'* (Mong. *šabi*), that was well distinguished from those under the authority of secular nobility. Later, these donations became regular occurrences and after the establishment of the Manchu's absolute rule over Mongolia the Manchu emperors not only presented the church with the construction of several monasteries, but at the same time with a significant number of *šabi* to maintain and serve them, and thus removed them from the secular nobility's authority. During the era of the Manchu rule, this group of Mongol society increased the most number wise. To demonstrate the process, it is enough just to consider the changes in the number of subjects living in those areas under the direct rule of the head

of the Buddhist church: while in 1764 the Buddhist church had 20 000 secular subjects, in less than 60 years, in 1825 it reached 100 000 and continued to grow until Mongolia's period of autonomy.

In 1723, the Manchu government established a new civil service unit as well named *ix šaw'* (Mong. *yeke šabi*) that was directly under the rule of the Öndör Gegēn, and the office of the *erdene sanjodba* (Mong. *erdeni šangjodba*) was specifically created to supervise it.

With the spread of Buddhism and the growing number of monasteries naturally the lamas' ranks significantly grew as well. In Mongolian society, the tradition of sending at least 1 son from every family to be a part of the monastic community, regardless of their social standing, was gradually formed. In part due to this tradition, by the end of the period practically every Mongol family had a direct connection with the Buddhist church.

During the same period when the monastic community was organized the religion's hierarchy was established as well. Those at the lowest ranks already devoted themselves to the Buddhist church, but lacked the proper initiations and thus were not full members of the church. They did all the work at the monasteries, though they were not the ones responsible for the supplies. That was the *šabis'*, who were ordained to serve the different monasteries, with no other responsibilities. The ranks between them and the highest ranking Buddhist monks were occupied by those who were educated and were properly initiated, took their vows as well and fulfilled their roles either as secretaries, healers or took part in the performance of rituals. The members of the highest ranking group were the heads of the monasteries, the supervisors of the ceremonies and the teaching lamas. The saints, high monks (Mong. *qutuytu*) (and the reincarnated lamas (mong. *qubilyan*) were a special, important part of these groups. The first of those few in possession of these special rights was the head of the Mongol Buddhist church, the *Bogd Gegēn*, but one can find several reincarnated lamas who had significant power and influence over the religious organization. A few of those were for example the *nomun xan* (Mong. *nom-un qan*), the *erdene pandita* (Mong. *erdeni bandid*), the *čin süčigt* (Mong. *čing süčigtü*), the *naran xutagt* (Mong. *naran qutuytu*), the *xamba nomun xan* (Mong. *qambu nom-un qan*), or the *jalxanj xutagt* (Mong. *jalqanja qutuytu*). At the beginning of the 20th century, in four of Mongolia's *aimags* 13 *qutuytu* lived besides the *Bogd Gegēn*. Legally, only these 14 high ranking dignitaries possessed independent territories, which from a political point of view had the same level of weight as the *xošüns*, and a personal seal that is the symbol of the highest power in Mongol historical tradition. The heads of the monasteries though practically had unrestricted power over the monasteries – thus, over all of the subjects under their authority as well –; however, they were not the owners of their subjects.

After Kangxi acquired authority over the Mongolian Buddhist church as well in 1691, the all-time head lamas' inauguration also required the emperor's assent from then on. In 1723, Yongzheng (1678-1735, reign 1722-1735, Mong. *Nayiraltu töb*, Khalkha: *Nayralt töw*) awarded the title of the "protector of the Buddhist church" and a gold seal to the first *jebcundamba*. Later, these became the traditional inauguration presents of the heads of the Buddhist church and a symbol of their power.

During the period of the Manchu reign, several offices were created that dealt exclusively with church matters, and the Buddhist administration was created with the inclusion of elements from Tibetan, Mongolian and Manchu administration as well. From those offices in charge of regular supervision one operated in Beijing and was under the authority of the Lifan Yuan; however, the real supervisors of the Buddhist church's everyday life were in the hands of two religious posts under the control of the Mongol head lama, the *xamba nomun xan* and the *erdene šanjodwa*. The emperor's influence is also traceable here, since the seal that symbolized the inauguration into office was the present of the emperor in this case as well. The two offices were different jurisdiction wise, but they were equal in rank and complemented each other in their work. Both were the equivalent of the secular administration's ministry level. The *xamba nomun xan* primarily dealt with religious cases, it governed the life of the congregation and the lamas. The *erdene sanjodwa* lead the administration of the office. From its 1723 establishment, its most important role was to supervise and manage the *Ix šabi*, the territory under the authority of the *Bogdo Gegēn*. Basically, he was the highest ranking treasurer of the Buddhist church. The ecclesiastic officer appointed by the Manchu was the Da Lama (Khalkha *da lam*), whose job, as the manifestation of the Manchu authority, was to observe whether they followed the central government's decisions or not. From the lower ranking offices the *corj* (Mong. *čorji*) deserves mentioning, such as a replacement for the *xamba*, the *demči* (Mong. *demči*) as the treasurer of the monastery, the *nyaraw* (Mong. *nirba*, Tib. *gnyer pa*) as a substitute for the *šanjodwa*, the superintendent of taxes. Thus, the organizational equivalent of the secular civil service was established at the Buddhist church operating on Khalkha territories, which was led by the Buddhist officers working there. Though on the other hand, the Inner-Mongol monastery system was directly managed from Beijing, and this facilitated these two organizations' gradual split from each other, which had its effects most felt after the dynasty's demise.

During this period the value of the church's incomes grew in spades and as a result its economic role in the country's life as well. Though in the beginning the economic centers built around the monasteries provided the only connection between church and economy later, by the end of the Manchu period and even more so during the theocratic era this situation greatly changed. Thanks to the regular donations from the emperor and the *šabis* ordered to serve the head lamas the proceeds of the Buddhist church continued to grow. The fact that they were not required to pay taxes to the Manchu court and also, in no small measure, that especially during the early 20th century they joined the trade market to sell the accumulated surplus had greatly helped their cause. In 1921, one fifth of Mongolia's whole wealth – whose value consisted of approximately 57 million gold Rubles – was in the hands of the Buddhist church.

The Buddhist church that was built with the effective help of the Qing emperors gradually became the second significant organizing force of Mongolian society beside secular administration. It had its own administrative system, taxes and the revenues resulting from them. A significant part of the Mongol economy and the Khalkha population had direct ties to the Buddhist church that, effectively, worked as a "state in

a state” which, though considerably dependent from the central power, still possessed a sort of inner autonomy and self-management.

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